
CHAPTER 3

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The theme of **conflict resolution** is the topic of the third chapter of the Peace Education volume because it presents students with useful peacemaking skills for dealing with conflict in their personal lives and makes them aware of the processes of peacemaking on the national and international levels. In this chapter students will learn about the elements of the conflict resolution process and practice social interaction skills and problem solving skills. Language skills are developed through vocabulary expansion and discussion, reading for information, and writing journal responses to conflict scenarios. Teachers can use the proposed lesson by itself or design a series of connected lessons that explore the theme in more detail. A more elaborate unit could include conflict scenarios for analysis and discussion at different levels of social interaction over an extended period of time. The lesson plan ideas presented here are meant to serve as a starting point for teachers interested in exploring the theme of conflict resolution with their students.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Conflict is a natural part of our daily lives and cannot be avoided. When viewed in a positive light, conflicts allow us to examine the status quo and engage in creative problem solving. We can use conflict situations to grow personally and to become more reflective. In addition, conflict situations, creatively handled, allow us to effect personal, organizational, and societal change. The world needs more people with peacemaking skills. Students who examine conflict situations for better understanding and who practice conflict resolution techniques in the classroom are better prepared to be effective peacemakers.

Conflict resolution experts have identified many skills that facilitate the smooth management of conflict. These include working cooperatively, developing good communication skills, learning to express our feelings constructively, and tolerance of diversity. Basic procedures setting out the process of conflict resolution are:

- **Analysis:** Defining the conflict (Explored in [Chapter 2](#) of this volume)
- **Ideation:** Developing **alternative solutions** (Explored in Chapter 3 of the Peace Education volume)
- **Strategy:** Gaining a working knowledge of conflict resolution techniques.
- **Risk-taking:** Choosing to act on solutions

Analysis: The first step toward resolving a conflict is to describe it accurately and **objectively**. Conflict tends to follow a similar pattern, which can be described as a situation in which two or more people interact and perceive incompatible differences or threats to their resources, needs, or values. At this point conflict arises. This causes the participants to behave in response to the interaction and their **perception** of it. The conflict can move in either of two directions, **escalation** (the conflict gets worse) or **de-escalation** (the conflict is resolved).

Ideation: Ideation involves creatively developing alternative solutions to a conflict. There are many possible ways to respond to conflict situations. One condition for long lasting de-escalation requires that attention be focused on the problem, not on the participants. Another condition for de-escalation is that there is a decrease in exposed emotion and perceived threat. Often a **"cooling-off" period** is needed before meaningful discussions can occur. If neutral or amicable relations existed before the conflict arose, and if the participants know how to make peace, or have someone to help them do so, de-escalation will continue. A normal reaction to a conflict situation is to find the most expedient solution, which often involves judgments of who is right and who is wrong, followed by action on these determinations. Most times someone wins and someone loses in these resolutions.

Another response is to think of alternate solutions and to weigh these in terms of resolving the problem to meet both participants' needs. This is described as looking for a **"win-win" resolution** for the conflict. The step of "ideation" in conflict resolution allows us to step back, reflect, and present creative and positive responses to conflict situations for both parties.

The strategies of conflict resolution and ways that solutions to conflict situations can be implemented are explored in Chapter 4 of the Peace Education Volume.

Effective peacemaking and peacekeeping requires knowledge, understanding, skill, and practice. Educators believe that peacemaking is one of the basic skills that should be learned in teacher education programs and taught to children in the classrooms of every nation in the world. Fortunately, many resource books on peacemaking and conflict resolution are available to teachers and parents to meet this need. One possible 50-minute lesson is described in this chapter in the next section.



CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The following 50-minute lesson gives an introduction to the process of conflict resolution. Teachers are encouraged to expand on the lesson and to adapt the language and content to the learning needs of their students.



PRELIMINARY LESSON PLANNING

Materials:

For Activity #1, you will need a large chart on which to put the new vocabulary related to conflict that will be introduced throughout the lesson. You will also need to make a *Conflict Resolution Grid* (See [Activity #1](#), Step 4 for an example of the *Grid*) to note the type of conflict that characterizes a particular conflict situation. This can be placed on the chalkboard during the discussion or made beforehand on erasable material so that it can be used again. Activity #1 also requires a *Conflict Analysis Checklist*, created with the class and transferred to a wall chart for future lessons (See Activity # 1, Step 7 for the *Checklist*).

For Activity #2, you will give the class [Appendix A](#), which contains five short situations that will be the basis for classroom group discussion. [Appendix B](#) provides an example of a Crossword Puzzle that helps students review the terminology of conflict resolution. The Glossary of Terminology for conflict resolution is found in [Appendix C](#) and can be used by students for reference and review throughout Chapter 3. Students need a notebook for recording new vocabulary and a journal for written responses to the activities.



WARM UP ACTIVITY

(approximately 15 minutes)

Purpose:

To establish concept readiness for the conflict resolution lesson.

Procedure:

Ask the students to think of a conflict that they experienced or that they have observed that ended in an unsatisfactory way. Ask them to write down a brief summary of the situation. They will keep this for use at the end of the class.

ACTIVITY #1

(Approximately 20 minutes)

Purpose:

- To introduce anecdotes about classroom situations which illustrate a conflict and to establish possible types of resolutions.(e.g., win-lose, lose-lose, or win-win resolutions)
- To reinforce the idea of conflict patterns and types of conflict (e.g., resources, needs, or values/goals) established in [Chapter 2](#)

Materials:

- The six stories in Appendix A.
- A "win-lose" grid

Procedure:

1. Tell the students that they are going to explore different ways to respond to situations in which there is conflict. The first situation occurs in a classroom. Ask students to imagine that context as they listen to the situation you describe.
Margie is playing with the class puppets. Donald wants to use the puppets to rehearse a play for his class project. Donald has asked Margie to give him the puppets, and Margie has refused, saying that she had the puppets first. Donald contends that the class project is more important, so he should have the puppets.

Ask the class the following questions in order to define the conflict:

What's the problem here?

What does Margie want? Why?

What does Donald want? Why?

Put the answers the class offers on the chalkboard.

2. Discuss the idea that conflicts arise when participants in an interaction perceive that there is an incompatible difference or a threat to what they "want" - e.g., to their resources, needs, or values. (See [Background information for Chapter 2](#)). Ask the class what type of conflict the situation with the puppets seems to be. An expected response would be a conflict of resources (the limited number of puppets) Students may also suggest a conflict of values (e.g., Margie likes playing with the puppets, while Donald believes that his class project is more important).
3. Discuss with the class what might happen if this conflict got worse, introducing the word "**escalate**" and placing it on the board, along with some examples (e.g., the children will start fighting, someone will get angry). Discuss what might happen if the conflict were to be resolved, introducing the word "**de-escalate**" and putting it on the chalkboard.
4. Ask students to act as the "**mediators**" (add word to the board and briefly discuss it) who will be responsible for helping to de-escalate the conflict.

Have the class discuss briefly who should get what; then ask them for a vote. Tabulate the results and note that in this resolution either Margie wins or Donald wins.

Make a *Conflict Resolution Grid* on the chalkboard that has four quadrants which represent possible resolutions to this conflict. Ask students to copy the grid in their notebooks.

	Margie gets what she wants	Margie doesn't get what she wants
Donald gets what he wants	<i>D wins - M wins</i>	<i>D wins - M loses</i>
Donald doesn't get what he wants	<i>M wins - D loses</i>	<i>D loses - M loses</i>

Ask students to fill in the grid with a "win-lose" label for the vote that was just taken. Either Donald wins and Margie loses, or Margie wins and Donald loses. Point out that when approached in this way, the resolution is focused on the participants, rather than on the problem itself.

- Ask what a possible lose-lose resolution might be (e.g., no one plays with the puppets). Ask if it is possible to have a "lose-lose" resolution that would be a positive one (i.e., avoid fighting or getting angry). Point out that this would be a **compromise** (add "compromise" to the chalkboard) in which case neither child gets everything he/she wants, but both are agree to the resolution. Ask students to suggest several possible compromises to the puppet situation. Ask students to add this label to the grid, along with the conditions that make this possible (e.g., sharing the puppets, with Margie helping Donald with his project). Point out that a "compromise" may result in very positive feelings for both participants, in which case it becomes a "win-win" resolution. For example, in the case of sharing, Margie may find it is more fun to play with someone else, and Donald may enjoy help with his project. A discussion of "wants" (what you desire) versus "needs" (what you cannot do without) could take place here.

Ask the students if there is any other way to resolve this conflict so that both participants get what they originally wanted. Introduce the idea of resolving conflicts by looking for a "win-win" resolution. Ask the class what would be necessary to achieve a win-win resolution (e.g., more puppets). Point out that when approached in this way, the resolution is focused on solving the problem by meeting both children's needs. Ask students to add the "win-win" label to the grid, along with the conditions that make this resolution possible (e.g., both children have puppets).

- Ask the class if "win-win" situations are always possible. Discuss with the class that "win-win" situations may not be possible as immediate solutions to conflicts, in which case a **"cooling off" period** (add "cooling off period" to the chalkboard) could be established by choosing a compromise, such as sharing the puppets, or even settling for a "win-lose" resolution in the short term. However, if conflict resolution is oriented toward looking for a win-win situation by identifying the problem in terms of needs, the resolution will point toward a more satisfactory long-term resolution. For example, in order to have a "win-win" situation for Donald and Margie, in which Margie can play with the puppets privately in the way that she wants and Donald can use the puppets for his project, more puppets are needed in the classroom. Ask the class how more puppets could be found. Students might suggest asking parents to help make more puppets or having the class take on making more puppets as a class project. Both of these options will take some time to accomplish, but having more puppets in the classroom should avoid similar conflicts in the future.
- Ask the class to summarize the conflict resolution process to this point. Develop a *Conflict Analysis Checklist* with the class. Include identification of the "needs" (Stage 1 of the conflict resolution process) and brainstorming alternate solutions (Step 2 of the conflict resolution process) as being important stages in the conflict resolution process, and often lead to long term positive solutions for all participants. Chart these points on the chalkboard and ask students to copy them in their notebooks.

Conflict Analysis Checklist	
The participants in the interaction perceive differences between or threat to their resources, needs or values.	
The participants respond according to their perceptions.	
Conflict	
If the conflict escalates, there might be:	Conditions needed to de-escalate the conflict are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fighting or arguing Hurt feelings and crying Hostility and tension 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the needs of both participants objectively Offer alternate solutions for positive long-term resolution

Transition from Activity #1 to Activity #2

Tell students that the rest of the lesson will be spent exploring conflict situations to practice Steps 1 (identifying the needs) and 2 (suggesting alternate solutions)



ACTIVITY #2

(approximately 20 minutes)

Purpose:

- To practice developing resolutions to conflict situation.

Procedures:

- Give the students [Appendix A](#). Work with the class to discuss Situation 1. Ask them to identify the elements of this conflict situation and put the responses on the chalkboard, following the Chart which was developed in Activity #1.

Who is involved in the conflict?

What do each of the participants perceive as incompatible differences or threats?

What type of conflict do you think it is? (Is it about resources, needs, or values/goals?)

What might happen if the conflict escalates? Develop an escalation scenario with the class.

What are possible ways to de-escalate and resolve the conflict?

Ask the class to work in triads to develop a de-escalation scenario. Ask the students to share the de-escalation scenario with the class and note where it fits in the win-lose chart.

2. Ask students to work with a partner and to choose one of the situations from Appendix A and to develop (1) an escalation scenario and (2) a conflict resolution scenario. They will complete the scenarios out of class. Ask them to prepare to present the scenarios to the full class at another class meeting, using the format of the Conflict Resolution Chart.

Note: Students can complete the scenarios individually and give them to the teacher as a journal entry if further class time cannot be spent on presentations.



COOL DOWN ACTIVITY

(Approximately 5 minutes)

Purpose:

To provide closure to the lesson.

Procedure:

Ask students to respond to the conflict they noted down at the beginning of class by writing in their journal. Ask them to describe what actually happened in the conflict, and then to describe another scenario that could result in a "win-win" resolution. After completing the journal out of class, the students can (1) share it with the teacher or (2) share it with other students in class, or (3) keep it as a private entry.



EXTENSIONS

1. Ask students to make up other conflict situations that are related to their personal lives. They could explore personal conflicts (e.g., a difficult choice or decision they must make) as well as interpersonal conflicts in their families, between friends, or in a "community" to which they belong (e.g., a team, a committee, a class, etc.). Use these situations in class to practice the initial steps of conflict resolution (See [Background information for Chapter 3](#)).
 - Define the conflict (e.g., the participants, a description of the conflict, and the type of conflict)
 - Identify the needs of both parties objectively
 - Develop alternate positive long term solutions

Lesson extensions built on the student scenarios could include:

- A. Students exchange scenarios with a partner and work together to brainstorm resolutions.
 - B. Students share the scenarios with the teacher in the form of a "dialog journal" (this could be done via e-mail).
 - C. Set aside class time for the students to work together on the situations in small groups or pairs. Have them prepare a role-play for the class to illustrate the scenarios and the solutions they suggested. Follow this with a class discussion.
2. Give pairs of students a conflict picture or a newspaper account of a conflict.

Have them prepare scripts for the conflict that will reveal the information required by the *Conflict Analysis Checklist*. Have students act out the scripts and as a class review the analysis of the conflict.

Variation: Give all student groups the same picture or news story. The scripts are performed as skits in which alternate solutions are offered for the same picture. Follow this with a class discussion of the most satisfactory solution. Use the *Conflict Resolution Grid* to record the type of conflict each group offers (e.g., win-lose, lose-lose, win-win) and the *Conflict Analysis Checklist* to guide the analysis.

3. Create a crossword puzzle which uses the conflict vocabulary that was presented in the lesson. Variation: Give students the words and have the students make up the clues. Give six different words to each group of students. They exchange their clues (after the teacher helps with the wording, etc.) with another group, who tries to complete the new crossword puzzle. See [Appendix C](#) for a glossary of conflict terminology and [Appendix B](#) for a sample Crossword puzzle.
4. Write terms related to the conflict resolution process on note cards. On large note cards, write a scenario consisting of two or three sentences or a dialogue exchange that illustrates the meaning of the term. Give half of the class the term note cards and half of the class the scenario note cards. Ask the students to move about the classroom to find the person whose card matches theirs. The students can then act out the scenario for the class, who tries to guess the correct term. Variation: Give students the term note cards and ask them to write the scenarios. Ask students to work in pairs. Have the pairs present their scenarios to the class, and ask the class to guess the term being depicted.



Conflict Resolution Situations

Story 1: Sylvia and Anita are sisters. Both are popular at school and usually go out with friends on weekends. However, they are both staying at home this Friday night. Sylvia has invited some of her friends over to watch MTV and have pizza. Anita has picked up a video movie that she wants to watch. There is only one TV and it is in the living room. Anita has begun to watch the video movie when Sylvia and her friends come home with the pizza. Sylvia asks Anita to give up the TV so that she and her friends can watch their show. Anita refuses, saying that she is already watching the movie and she wants to finish

Story 2: Cindy is the youngest daughter in a family of four children. The household chores are divided among Cindy and her brothers and sisters. Being the youngest, she usually ends up doing the dishes, while the others mow the lawn, mop the floors, and so forth. Cindy does the dishes every day, seven days a week, while the other jobs often only need to be done once a week. She thinks that it is unfair that she has a daily chore and the others do not. She often pouts, grumbles and says mean things at mealtimes. Her brothers and sisters have begun to respond to her in the same way, and family meals are very unpleasant.

Story 3: Ricky is one of three children. He is very talented musically and has been chosen to join a well-known choir that performs weekly in a large church. In order to be in this choir, Ricky must attend choir rehearsals twice a week after school. His parents must take him by car, as the rehearsals are a distance from the school and their home. Ricky's two brothers would like to stay after school and participate in sports, but they are unable to do so because there is no after-school transportation to their home, and Ricky's parents are using the car to get Ricky to choir and from choir rehearsals. The brothers are very disappointed, especially since Ricky's choir obligation will go on for another five years. They have begun to be mean to Ricky and outspoken to their parents, who often punish them for their rudeness.

Story 4: Juan and Marco live next to each other in the dormitory. They know each other, but are not good friends. Juan has a paper due the next day in his history course and has brought many books from the library to his room to work. Marco and several friends are having a party in Marco's room, which has turned out to be quite noisy. Juan is becoming more and more upset because he cannot concentrate. He storms into Marco's room and demands that they stop the party so he can study. Marco says Juan should go to work in the library, where it is quiet all the time.

Story 5: The Browns and the Jones are neighbors in a small community. The Browns want to plant a row of fruit trees at the back of their yard. The trees would obstruct the Jones' view of the lake, which was one of the reasons the Jones bought that particular house. The trees have arrived and the neighbors are all in their backyards. An argument has begun, and the families are angrily exchanging insults.

Story 6: Mrs. Chu has recently moved with her family into an apartment building that has a laundry room for all tenants to share. The laundry room has three washers and three dryers for the ten apartments in the building, which has previously been adequate. Since Mrs. Chu moved in, the tenants often have to wait several hours before they can use the laundry because Mrs. Chu has all machines occupied. They suspect that she is doing the laundry of her relatives as well as her own. They are no longer friendly to Mrs. Chu and sometimes make rude racial comments or do something nasty such as empty her wash on the floor when she is not there.

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APPENDIX B

Sample Crossword Puzzle														
Teachers can use a CD-ROM called <i>Crossword Creator</i> to create this puzzle and others for their students.														
	¹ R													
¹ N	E	E	D	S										
	S													³ R
	O					² C	O	M	P	R	O	M	I	S
	L					O								S
	U				³ A	P	O	L	O	G	I	Z	E	O
	T					L								U
	⁴ I	D	⁴ E	A	T	I	O	N						R
	O		S			F								C
	N		C			F								E
			A											S
			L											
			A				⁵ V	I	O	L	E	N	C	E
			T				A							
		⁶ D	E	E	S	C	A	L	A	T	E			
							U							
							E							
							S							

Across

1. What you cannot do without
2. To give something up to reach an agreement
3. To say you are sorry
4. In conflict resolution, the stage of developing creative alternative solutions
5. Physical contact that could result in bodily harm
6. To do something to avoid violence or a worsening condition

Down

1. An agreement
2. A period of time away from a situation in order to reduce exposed emotions
3. What people protect or look at as their own to use
- 4 A situation gets worse, perhaps involving violence
- 5 Beliefs, attitudes, what one thinks is right or wrong

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Glossary of Important Terms

The Glossary has words and definitions that are often used to discuss the concept of conflict.

Alternative solutions - More than one possible way to solve a conflict. In Conflict Resolution, the alternative solutions should point to meeting the needs of both participants and to establishing a long-term solution to the problem.

Analysis of a conflict situation - The first step in the conflict resolution process in which all participants cooperate to define the conflict objectively.

Compromise - A situation in which both participants to a conflict agree to give up something in order to resolve the conflict. A compromise is often an intermediate stage in moving toward long-term resolution of a conflict.

Conflict resolution - The process of creatively responding to a conflict in order to find ways to solve the problem.

Cooling off period - A time for exposed emotion concerning the conflict to be dissipated. When a conflict becomes volatile there needs to be a cooling off period before resolution can begin.

De-escalation of conflict - De-escalation of conflict involves a reduction of strong emotion and working to give an objective description of the problem. De-escalation of a conflict leads to possible resolution of the conflict.

Escalation of conflict - A conflict situation gets worse and might lead to violence.

Ideation of a conflict situation - The second step in the conflict resolution process, in which everyone thinks creatively to develop alternative solutions to the conflict.

Mediator - A person who helps with the de-escalation and resolution of a conflict.

Objective - To be objective about a problem is to be accurate in the description of the problem and fair and unbiased in stating the participants' needs.

Perception - A perception of a conflict reflects one person's understanding of the situation. Participants' perceptions of a conflict situation may be strongly influenced by their emotional involvement as well as attachment to their own needs, desires, wants, and goals. A goal of Conflict Resolution is to help the participants to objectively and accurately describe the conflict situation in terms of both participants' needs.

A win-win resolution - A solution to a conflict that allows all participants to be satisfied that their needs have been met.

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